

## **Mountain-Prairie Region Guide to Hosting Secretarial and Other VIP Visits**

### Introduction

This guide is provided by Region 6 External Affairs for our field personnel who may find themselves in the position of hosting a visit by the Secretary of the Interior, Service Director, or other VIP(s), most likely in conjunction with a special event occurring at their station. It is intended as a general overview of the expected process when a VIP visit is planned. More detailed information and further guidance is available from members of the External Affairs staff, listed below. National guidance on conducting special events is available in the Service's National Outreach Guide, Appendix A-7  
<http://ssi.fws.gov/outreach.handbookpdf>

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## I. How it Starts and What We Do

The request to host a VIP at a Service field station may originate from the Office of the Secretary, from the WO or RO, or from another source. As the liaison and primary contact with field stations for VIP visits, the R6 External Affairs staff will contact the Project Leader as soon as we receive any information that a VIP may be visiting that station.

During planning for the VIP visit, External Affairs will usually serve as primary liaison/contact with the VIP(s) office. External Affairs will also serve as the primary contact/liaison to all WO and RO staffs, and external audiences such as media, Congressional and other legislative staffs, Tribal representatives, partners, etc. Depending on the complexity of the event, External Affairs may be in attendance on-site at the station several days in advance, as well as during the event, to help coordinate last-minute details and contacts, and facilitate the visit running as planned.

If the idea to invite the Service Director, the Secretary of the Interior, or other VIP to an event originates in the field office, the Project Leader must notify RO External Affairs. When appropriate, External Affairs will submit a formal request to WO Public Affairs for the VIP's participation. Other VIP invitations (for example to elected officials) are handled in different ways, but in every case External Affairs is available to communicate these invitations. Please let us know whenever we can provide assistance and support.

## II. Outlining the Visit

When a VIP visit is initiated, the basics of the visit must first be determined and understood: the *Who*, *What*, *When*, *Where* and *Why*. (The *How* is more specific and will be outlined in the "Working" Event Plan, which is the next step.) External Affairs and the Project Leader/field staff may meet or conduct an initial conference call to ensure the basics of the VIP visit are finalized before proceeding with further plans for the event.

Who: A VIP visit often attracts attendance by other VIPs. Determine the guest list and RSVP date as early as possible. Plan for contingencies if VIPs cancel on short notice.

What: Is the VIP visit part of a larger event, or is it the event itself? Either way, the visit should be showcased and the VIP(s) provided an opportunity to speak to the public and/or media.

When: Determine the date of the visit and begin informing those involved *as early as possible*. Where: Determine exactly where on-site you will hold ceremonies, nature walks, etc.

Why: What are the Region's goals for the visit: media coverage, increased public awareness of the event, communication of station/State-wide/Regional issues to the VIP(s)/ media/ or public. The Event Plan should focus on accomplishing these goals from start to finish.

### III. The "Working" Event Plan

The importance of *early planning* cannot be overstated. While VIP visits sometimes occur on short notice, the earlier planning often provides the most control over the outcome of the success of the event. Congressionals often require at least 3 months advance notice to attend public events, for example. Events with expected attendance of 100 people or more are often planned starting up to a year in advance.

Planning the VIP visit - or working it into existing plans for a special event - will be done jointly by External Affairs and the field station. Often, the VIP's office will determine many of the details of the visit, which will be communicated through External Affairs. The Event Plan should be considered flexible and be expected to change many times before the visit, as details are refined and the VIP's plans often change on short notice.

Close coordination between External Affairs and the field station throughout the planning processing -as the "Working" Event Plan changes and is implemented - will ensure the visit goes smoothly and that goals for the visit are met. The assumption of specific roles and responsibilities in this process will maximize the ease of this process:

The field station will be expected to coordinate most of the on-site logistics for actual special event and field visit, with support from External Affairs, the RO program staff, and others as needed.

External Affairs will handle most coordination with outside partners, including advance notification and on-site coordination with media, Congressionals, and Tribal representatives.

*Maps:* Accurate site maps need to be created early the planning process, for inclusion in advance information packets to VIPs, Congressionals, etc. With the help of information from the field station and in coordination with External Affairs, professional maps will be produced by Refuges Division of Planning at the Regional Office.

*Security:* Law enforcement and security needs vary with the complexity of the event. In coordination with the field station and External Affairs, a Regional Office "special event team" will be available early in the planning process to access these needs, determine staffing levels required, and coordinate all aspects of law enforcement and security arrangements required for the event. (The only exception would be personal security for the cabinet level officials and above, which are handled by the VIP's personal security detail.)

#### IV. Identifying Local Issues

Most public events involving a VIP visit will benefit from identification of local, Service-related issues, which External Affairs will summarize with the help of the Project Leader and other Service staff, as appropriate. A summary of current issues helps:

- Provide background information to VIP, who may field related questions from the media
- Plan for advance media interviews and VIP availability to address significant issues
- Anticipate possible public protests and plan for Law Enforcement/security concerns

Field staff should alert External Affairs about any sensitive issues that might be expected to result in questions from the public or media during a VIP visit. Project Leaders should also inform External Affairs if permits are requested for public protesting or free speech demonstrations during a special event or VIP visit.

External Affairs will coordinate with WO and other contacts to determine the extent to which current issues should to be documented, and will request additional information from the field staff as needed.

#### V. Other Resources

R6 Project Leaders with recent experience hosting VIPs at large special events:

Dave Hilley, Quivira National Wildlife Refuge	620-486-2393
Steve Brimm, D.C. Booth Historic National Fish Hatchery	605-642-7730
Lori Beck, Great Plains Nature Center	316-683-5499

Custom Maps for Field Events:

Sean Fields, Division of Refuge Planning	303-236-8145, x625
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Law Enforcement "special events security team"

Jon Storey, Regional Refuges LE Supervisor	303-236-8145, x228
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